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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENTS

REF: A. CAIRO 2013

[1](#)B. CAIRO 1694

Classified by ECPO Counselor John Desrocher for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Egypt's opposition party scene has witnessed two significant developments recently. Court consideration of a suit filed by the proposed Wasat Party, appealing the GOE's rejection of its license application, was postponed yet again to September. Leaders of the party, which has been fighting for legal recognition for 10 years, charge that the GOE forced several Coptic co-founders to resign in order to strengthen its argument that the Wasat is an Islamist/religiously based party and therefore unconstitutional. Meanwhile, the opposition Wafd Party, the faded but still venerable dean of Egyptian political parties, elected liberal reform advocates Mahmoud Abaza as Party President and Mounir Abdel Nour as Secretary General. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On June 3, an administrative court postponed consideration of the appeal of the moderate-Islamist Wasat Party to September 16. The Wasat is appealing the decision of the GOE's Political Parties Committee to reject its application for legal recognition on the grounds that the Egyptian Constitution forbids religiously-based parties. Wasat's lawyers joked that the court's postponement's have become "a tradition" - the court has been repeatedly postponing consideration of the appeal for over a year. Significantly, George Ishaq, a Copt and leader of the Kefaya protest movement, attended the court session. He made clear to observers that he was not a Wasat Party member but there "in solidarity" with the group.

[1](#)3. (C) In a May meeting with poloff, Wasat Vice Chairman Essam Soltan (protect) insisted that the party is not in conflict with the constitution as the party's program calls for tolerance and pluralism but nonetheless recognizes the "Islamic framework" of Egyptian society. Though party leader Aboul Ela Mady is a former member (and now harsh critic) of the Muslim Brotherhood, the party is proud to include a number of Copts among its co-founders and in its membership. However, in April, seven Coptic co-founders publicly resigned from the party. Soltan alleges that they did so after being put under extreme duress by State Security - which is laying the groundwork, he claims, for a court decision upholding the PPC's rejection of Wasat as a religiously-based party.

[1](#)4. (C) In late May, the Wasat announced that four "respected and prominent Copts" had joined the party. Whether or not the Wasat includes Copts on its membership rolls, many doubt the GOE will permit the group to license. Amr Choubaki, an analyst at the Al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, told us

recently that the GOE will not legalize the Wasat "in the current political atmosphere...the state is trying to amputate the legs off of any serious political movement with vision and influence."

¶5. (C) Meanwhile, the faded but historic and venerable Wafd Party is setting its house in order and recovering from the internal turmoil that climaxed on April 1, when deposed party leader No'man Gomaa and a group of armed supporters seized party headquarters, violently expelling staff loyal to Mahmoud Abaza's faction. On June 2, a party conference elected Abaza new party President, replacing Mustafa Al-Taweel, who had served as a caretaker leader since March. On June 5, Coptic businessman Mounir Abdel Nour defeated incumbent El Sayed El Badawi to become the party's new Secretary General.

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¶6. (C) Abdel Nour is an intimate and long-term ally of Abaza - the two now appear to have cleared the path to implement their ambitious plans to rebuild the Wafd into an effective opposition party and a voice for liberals in Egypt. Abdel Nour recently told poloff that one of the first items on their agenda will be to overhaul the party newspaper, which has suffered a major decline in circulation and revenue in recent years. He acknowledged that the paper's spurious editorial policies, which have included regular rhetorical attacks on the U.S., often playing fast and loose with the facts, need to be reviewed.

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